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Sundance Film Festival 2018

John C. Lyden

Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa, johnclyden@gmail.com

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Sundance Film Festival 2018

Abstract

Introduction to the Sundance Film Festival 2018.

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



Sundance Film Festival 2018

As we went to Park City in January once again for the Sundance and Film Festival, I was struck by the fact that there was a shortage of snow this year—but there was no shortage of great films to see.

There were 13,468 film submissions this year, including 3901 feature films, more than half of those international. 122 feature length films were selected for the Festival, representing 29 countries, along with 69 short films from 25 countries; 108 world feature film premieres, and 30 short film world premieres, were included. Of these, many were first time filmmakers (for features, 53) and many were women. 37% of the features were directed by women, and 51% of the shorts, which is considerably higher than the industry average. See my review of *Half the Picture* which details the experiences and challenges faced by women filmmakers today, a topic also much discussed at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

Sometimes when I tell the people that I meet at Sundance that I am doing coverage for the *Journal of Religion & Film*, I get a sort of blank stare that often accompanies my mention of the

journal to those outside the academic world. For some people, it would seem that religion and film cannot possibly have anything to do with one another, unless one were reviewing *Ben Hur* or *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. But films relate to religion in so many ways, explicitly as well as implicitly—and it was no struggle to find films on the program that were clearly about religion. Among the Festival award winners, the US Grand Jury Prize Dramatic went to *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, a story about the misguided efforts of Christian fundamentalists to “convert” gay teens to heterosexuality. The World Cinema Grand Jury Prize Dramatic went to *Butterflies*, a beautiful Turkish film about three siblings seeking to bury their father in a setting that is oddly post-Islamic and yet still powerfully religious. The Audience Award for World Cinema Documentary went to *This is Home*, the story of four Syrian Muslim families who arrived a year ago in Baltimore as refugees; they were present for the screening. Other films related to religion such as *Come Sunday*, a dramatization of how a Pentecostal minister came to believe in universal salvation; *King in the Wilderness*, a documentary about the last years of Martin Luther King, Jr.; and *Believer*, the documentary made about how Mormon rock musician Dan Reynolds has worked to combat prejudice against gays in his own religious community. Other films may have been less obviously about religion, but all related to the power of stories to shape our values and beliefs as part of our cultural *mythos*. We hope that you will find many reviews here that will prompt you to see the films for yourself and discover their beauty and depth.

And once again, we must thank all the volunteers who make the Festival possible, as well as the Sundance Film Festival Press Office for all their assistance. We couldn’t do any of this without you!



Nicolas Cage, from the Red Carpet for *Mandy*. Below, Linus Roache and Andrea Riseborough.
Photos by Monica Blizek.

